



**Testimony of Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director  
Appalachian Mountain Club**

**In support of LD 1488 Resolve, to Study and Recommend Improvements to Maine's Dam  
Safety  
May 3, 2021**

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and members of the Environment and Natural Resources committee, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Founded in 1876, AMC is the nation's oldest conservation, recreation, and education organization, with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,500 members in Maine and own 75,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, carbon sequestration, backcountry recreation, and environmental education.

We support LD 1488. Strategy G of *Maine Won't Wait*, Maine's Climate Action Plan through 2024, is Invest in Climate-Ready Infrastructure. The plan specifically calls for statewide vulnerability assessments for all forms of infrastructure, including water infrastructure. LD 1488 is one way to implement that recommendation.

An assessment of the vulnerability of Maine's dams appears long overdue. News media articles in 2011 made clear that staffing was inadequate to carry out the mandated inspections for nearly 100 dams classified as having high or significant hazard potential. A 2019 investigation by the Associated Press found staffing and funding for Maine's dam safety program among the lowest in the country.

Dam failures can cause significant property damage and negative environmental impact. Fortunately, Maine has not yet seen loss of human life from a dam failure, and we should act before tragedy strikes, as it did in neighboring New Hampshire in 1996.

Climate change heightens the risk from aging dams. Flooding is one of the most common causes of dam failure, and the increased precipitation and more frequent heavy rainfall brought on by climate change create increased risk of infrastructure collapse.

To prevent the damage to property and our environment, as well as the potential loss of life, that can result from catastrophic failure, we must first evaluate both the condition of our dams and the efficacy of our dam safety program.

For all these reasons, we ask you to vote LD 1488 Ought to Pass.